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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASHGABAT 000439

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN AND DRL

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SUBJECT: GOTX DRAFTING STUDENTS STUDYING ABROAD INTO ARMY

Classified By: Amb. Tracey A. Jacobson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) The GOTX has ordered male Turkmenistani citizens of Kazakh ethnicity studying in Kazakhstan to return home for military service, according to information from a Kazakh Diaspora contact. The contact provided Post with a copy of a letter sent by the Turkmen Embassy in Astana to South Kazakhstan State University asking for the University's assistance in informing Turkmenistani citizens studying there that they must return to Turkmenistan. In a letter to the Ambassador, the contact said that the Kazakh University of International Relations and World Languages had received a similar request. Military service is compulsory for all Turkmenistani men when they reach 18 years of age; however, students typically are allowed to defer their service until after graduation. According to the Turkmen Embassy letter, "competent" military authorities would consider the educational deferment issue on a case-by-case basis once each individual had appeared and presented proof of his student status. (Comment: Kazakh Embassy Counselor Askar Tazhibayev told Poloff that approximately 20 Turkmenistani students of Kazakh descent study in Kazakhstan each year as part of a Government of Kazakhstan-sponsored exchange program. Tazhibayev said that the GOTX is generally unhelpful, but has not actively opposed the program in the past; he was not aware of any efforts to force these students to return home. End Comment.)

¶2. (C) Ukrainian First Secretary Igor Roman told poloff on April 21 that he is unaware of a similar request to Ukrainian educational institutes. However, a number of Turkmenistanis studying in Ukraine and Russia also have been prevented from returning to school. Roman said that Turkmen border guards have a list of students provided by the Ministry of Defense. If a student on the list tries to exit Turkmenistan, the border guards turn him back and instruct him to contact military authorities. When the student does so, he is drafted. Roman said that his unofficial advice to the estimated 1,000 plus Turkmenistani students studying in Ukraine is that they should consider not returning to Turkmenistan until they complete their education.

¶3. (C) Comment: Turkmenistan continues to refuse to recognize diplomas from foreign educational institutions, despite agreements with several countries, including Kazakhstan and Ukraine, to do so. Because the individuals in question are students at "unrecognized" universities, the GOTX likely would argue that the student deferment does not apply to them. These latest actions are in line with past GOTX actions, including efforts to discourage Turkmenistanis from

studying at the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek, and represent just the latest obstacle thrown up in front of Turkmenistanis trying to obtain a quality education and to interact with the outside world. End Comment.  
JACOBSON